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Maynard says he convinced UConn officials to develop plan for Avery Point

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Hartford – A \$15 million investment for infrastructure at the University of Connecticut's Avery Point campus passed the state House 120-21 in the early hours of Wednesday but Sen. Andrew Maynard, D-Stonington, says that is not enough.

"We are happy about it, but that doesn't do a damn thing for academics, so when people say '\$15 million down there' it is essentially maintenance of waterfront -- which is needed but represents, in my view, a very small first investment in realizing the full potential of Avery Point," Maynard said Wednesday.

The Senate had passed the bill, 29-5. It now heads to the governor for his signature.

Before the vote on a \$1.55 billion investment in the university's infrastructure in several locations, Maynard met with Senate President Pro Tempore Donald Williams, D-Brooklyn, and UConn President Susan Herbst to argue for more than \$15 million for Avery Point. The meetings resulted in a commitment from Herbst to come up with a plan and timeline for development of the Groton campus, Maynard said.

"I would say the message was received fully, and we are taking folks on their word that they are serious about sorting out a plan for the campus," Maynard said.

The delegation from southeastern Connecticut supports the plan, he said.

He said development of the campus, a former mansion property on Long Island Sound, could take five to eight years and the plan might include tearing down the research and development building, a new academic building near or at that location and a dorm.

The university has resisted building dorms at its satellite campuses, but that is starting to change with investment for dorms at the Stamford campus, Maynard said.

Avery Point could also have a conference facility for coastal science studies, "not enormous, just a place where you could have a capacity of people come for lectures, conferences and events, sizable enough that it would be able to host people from around the country," Maynard said.

The co-chairs of the legislature's higher education committee, Williams and members of the local delegation will be invited to tour the campus soon to talk about the project, he said.

Of the funds already approved for Avery Point, \$10 million is for renovating two buildings and \$5 million is for improving the dock used for research vessels.

Campus director Michael Alfultis said he would like to put offices, bathrooms and a classroom in the original Morton Freeman Plant boathouse. The \$5 million won't allow Avery Point to splurge, but he said he thought the campus could get what it needs done.

Renovations will include the academic and the community and professional buildings, which house such graduate level workforce development programs as nursing, teaching and engineering.

The total UConn bond package of \$1.55 billion will be released over a 10-year period and will be paid back over 20 years. It will cost about \$2.4 billion to pay back over two decades, including \$814,300 million in interest, according to the bill.

Much of the bonded funding will be used for upgrades such as science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) facilities, teaching and research labs for additional faculty, students and equipment for new faculty.

In a press release today, the governor said, "I applaud Speaker Sharkey and the legislature for their action on this bill. It will support a major expansion at UConn, bring thousands of jobs to the state, and attract millions of dollars in research investment and business activity."

Maynard said he is happy about the \$15 million for maintenance to the dock and boathouse, but it's been 22 years since there has been a "substantial" investment in Avery Point.

"I think we could yield lucrative return for the university and the economy. I don't know why we haven't been able to get that achieved before this," Maynard said.
